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ABSTRACT

This investigation was undertaken to determine if economically deprived students' behavior, attendance and achievement would improve as a result of teacher-parent dialogue and contact through Family Involvement-Communication System (FICS) training. The procedures developed as FICS training were based upon the following assumptions: (1) low-income parents can be trained to train middle-class teachers in communicating effectively with parents and children living in low-income neighborhoods; and (2) more open communication and involvement between school and home would enhance the educational growth of youngsters. The results of this investigation indicate that increased communication and involvement between low-income families and teachers significantly increase children's average daily attendance and achievement. FICS training may be effective in opening lines of communication and involving low-income parents and teachers in productive dialogue and action, thereby enhancing the educational growth of youngsters. (Author)

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An Analysis of a Family Involvement-Communication System in a Title I Elementary School[1]

by

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Current research studies indicate that a sizable percentage of teachers possess the "attitudinally disadvantaged teacher syndrome." That large numbers of teachers hold negative attitudes about teaching economically deprived children and concomitantly experience depressive feelings when teaching in low-income neighborhood schools is not surprising to social researchers.

White (1969) states that when a teacher is presented with 35 to 40 children who have different speech models at home, who have minimal reinforcement for school achievement, and who frequently come to school hungry and in need of medical and dental care, he becomes overwhelmed by the tremendous deficits and the small number of instruments and classroom materials to use for educational improvement.

Selakovich (1970) discusses the distinct characteristics of social classes that have a tendency to create a "cultural shock" for the middle-class-oriented teacher who possesses a cultural and social system different from that of the economically deprived parent and child. Cheyney (1967) states that conflicts that occur between teachers of economically deprived children and their parents

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generally have their roots in the cultural set each one brings in his personal background to the classroom.

Student's attitudes about the significance of formal education are closely related to their social class. Education does not have the same meaning for many economically deprived Americans as it has for many middle class Americans. According to Riesman (1962) there is practically no interest in knowledge for its own sake; quite the contrary, a pragmatic anti-intellectualism prevails. Therefore, education often is not seen as an opportunity for the development of self-expression, self-realization and growth.

Active participation in school experiences of their children has been shown to be related to parent attitudes and behavior. Cloward and Jones (1963) found the involvement of parents in school affairs to be positively correlated to their evaluations of the importance of education and their attitudes toward the school as an institution. Rankin (1967) investigated the relationship between parent behavior and achievement of inner-city elementary school children and found substantial differences between the attitudes and behavior of mothers of high-achieving and low-achieving children. The mothers of high-achieving children were better able to discuss school matters and to initiate conferences with school officials.

Parental involvement in the school not only is associated with student attitudes and behaviors, but also seems to influence teacher attitudes toward students. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) state that students who profited from positive changes in teachers expectations of their ability had parents who were involved in their childs school development and had contact with the teachers.

Thus, it appears that an affective area which shows potential for enhancing the performance of economically deprived children is the improved self-concept resulting from active parent participation in the school experience of their

youngsters. A review of the research by Lopate, Flaxman, Bynum and Gordon (1970) stresses that parent involvement can integrate the child's school and home life and provide him with a model of participation and control in a major area of his life.

The Problem

Many of the educationally related services of Title I elementary schools are essentially student centered and tend to focus on one child in the family. There is a tendency to overlook the dynamics of family life and to overlook the relationships between parents, children, and teachers as a functional social-emotional unit. In other words, most educational programs are planned and administered in terms of what professionals think is best for the student rather than taking into consideration the needs and goals of parents and teachers.

One of the most critical factors influencing the education of economically deprived children, according to Del Popolo (1965), is the personality of the teacher and his attitude and understanding of children. Ordinarily, attitudes emerge from first-hand experiences, but since each individual cannot know every other individual and because situations arise in which teachers and parents are called upon to react to people whom they do not know, a common practice is to adopt the feelings of the dominant middle-class society toward economically deprived groups.

In any event, this investigation was based upon the premise that behavior rooted in attitudes and beliefs will change as a consequence of involvement and communication between parents and teachers, thus, resulting in more satisfying and productive school experiences for students. This research was undertaken to answer the following question: Will economically deprived student's behavior improve, attendance rise, and grade point average improve as a result of teacher

and parent dialogue and contact through Family Involvement-Communication System (FICS) training?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were generated from the preceding question:

1. There is no difference between the attendance of students taught by FICS trained teachers and students taught by teachers functioning without FICS training.
2. There is no difference in the incidence of referred behavioral problems of pupils taught by FICS trained teachers and of pupils taught by teachers functioning with FICS training.
3. There is no difference in the achievement, as measured by each pupil's grade point average, of pupils taught by FICS trained teachers and of pupils taught by teachers functioning without FICS training.

Methodology

The procedure for this study was based upon the assumption that low-income parents can be trained to train teachers in family involvement and communication skills. Hopefully, this approach will facilitate open lines of communication between school and home, and ultimately enhance the educational growth of youngsters.

Subjects

Five teachers from one Title I elementary school in Stillwater, Oklahoma, were randomly selected from a group of volunteers to participate in FICS training. Six randomly assigned pupils from each of these five teacher's classrooms (30 pupils) comprised the experimental group. Six randomly assigned pupils (30 pupils) from each of five other randomly selected teachers comprised the control group. The control group pupils had teachers who did not participate

in FICS training.

Procedure

FICS training consisted of two workshops, on-going case study activities, and a series of home visitations. The first workshop was designed to train five low-income mothers, each selected by an experimental group teacher, as Communication Specialists. The format for the five-day workshop was:

Monday - Topic: Philosophy and purposes of Stillwater Public Schools

Tuesday - Topic: Human growth and development

Wednesday - Topic: Effective child-rearing techniques

Thursday - Topic: Interview techniques

Friday - Topic: Attempts at integration

During the course of a five month period, September, 1972 through January, 1973, each of the five Communication Specialist-Teacher teams made two visits to the homes of six students in the experimental group. Each Communication Specialist made an additional three visits to the homes of six students. Therefore, each of the homes of the experimental group children were visited five times.

Each Communication-Specialist-Teacher team selected one of the students in the experimental group and prepared a written case study using Demming's Case-Study outline (1962). The Case Studies were conducted for the purpose of bringing about a better adjustment of the child and for increasing dialogue between team members.

A second workshop was held to implement further dialogue between the Communication Specialists and the experimental group teachers. The agenda of this second workshop consisted of a discussion of the case study activities engaged in by each Communication Specialist-Teacher team.

Results

The t test for a difference between two independent means, Bruning and Kintz (1968), was used to test the three null hypotheses. Table 1 presents the results of the t test for hypothesis 1: there is no difference between the attendance of students taught by FICS trained teachers and students taught by teachers functioning without FICS training. Hypothesis 1 was rejected at the

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Insert Table 1 about here

.05 level of significance. The average daily attendance of pupils taught by FICS trained teachers was significantly higher than the average daily attendance of the control group pupils.

Table 2 presents the results of the t test for hypothesis 2: There is no difference in the incidence of referred behavioral problems of pupils taught by FICS trained teachers and of pupils taught by teachers functioning without FICS training. Hypothesis 2 was not rejected. Teacher referral for

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Insert Table 2 about here

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pupil behavior problems was not significantly different for FICS and control group students.

Table 3 presents the results of the t test for hypothesis 3: there is no difference in the achievement, as measured by each pupil's grade point average of pupils taught by FICS trained teachers and of pupils taught by teachers functioning with FICS training. Hypothesis 3 was rejected at the .01 level of

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Insert Table 3 about here

TABLE 1

Mean Change, Standard Deviations, and

t Ratios of Pre and Post Average Daily Attendance

for FICS and Control Group Students

Group	Mean Change	S.D.	t Ratio	p
FICS	1.00	2.4202	2.1605	$<.05$
Control	-.30	2.1995		

TABLE 2

Means, Standard Deviations and t Ratios of Incidence of Referred Behavioral Problems of FICS and Control Group Students

Group	Mean	S.D.	t Ratio	p
FICS	.24	.5110	1.5572	
Control	.57	1.0063		

TABLE 3

Mean change, Standard Deviations and

t Ratios of Pre and Post Grade

Point Averages of FICS and

Control Group Students

Group	Mean Change	S.D.	t Ratio	p
FICS	.23	.3156	3.6854	< .01
Control	-.01	.1625		

significance. The grade point averages of pupils of FICS trained teachers were significantly higher than the grade point averages of pupils in the control group.

Conclusions

Within the limitations of this study, it appears the two home contacts by the Communication-Specialist-Teacher teams and the three additional home visits by the Communication Specialists provided impetus to the visited parents to encourage more regular school attendance in their children. Perhaps the home visits implied a real interest in or concern for their children and, therefore, created in the parents a more positive attitude toward school. The home visits may have also created an interest in school on the part of the child.

If teachers have contact with parents (through visiting in student's homes) they may gain greater insight and appreciation of the total child. This deeper understanding of the child is then reflected in the child's grade point average. Perhaps the teachers, through home visitations, learned of children's needs and interests and could use their new knowledge in relating curriculum to each individual child. Possibly, by the teacher visiting in his home, the child feld a special concern and interest shown in him, and therefore, tried harder at school to fulfill the teacher's expectations. In other words, since you care for me, I will show you through good school work, that I care for you.

Summary

This investigation was undertaken to determine if economically deprived student's behavior, attendance and achievement would improve as a result of teacher-parent dialogue and contact through Family Involvement-Communication System (FICS) training. The procedures developed as FICS training were based

upon the following assumptions: (1) low-income parents can be trained to train middle-class teachers in communicating effectively with parents and children (families), living in low-income neighborhoods; and (2) more open communication and involvement between school and home would enhance the educational growth of youngsters.

Five low-income mothers were trained to serve as Communication Specialists. The five Communication-Specialist-Teacher teams made two visits to the homes of six students (30 youngsters comprised the experimental group). Each Communication Specialist made an additional three visits to the homes of the youngsters. Each Communication-Specialist-Teacher team also engaged in on-going case study activities.

The results of this investigation indicate that increased communication and involvement between low-income families and teachers significantly increase children's average daily attendance and achievement, as measured by grade point averages. FICS training may have been effective in opening lines of communication and involving low-income parents and teachers in productive dialogue and action, and thereby, enhanced the educational growth of youngsters.

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